

Boston 200 Broadside Series

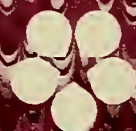
Literary Boston

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Boston 200

Literary Boston

A Walking Tour



Henry David Thoreau

During the mid-nineteenth century, described by F. O. Matthiessen as the "American Renaissance," an extraordinary number of notable writers lived in or visited Beacon Hill and Back Bay. Because the area is small, it is possible to rediscover this part of our past through a walking tour. The nineteenth century provides the richest material for a walking tour of Boston, but any vital tradition reaches beyond time and place: the strong individualism that characterized Boston writing in the last century grew out of the Puritan's struggle with his conscience and remains part of the modern writer's alienation.

Because that special insight which makes literature more real than life has to be respected, some imaginary events are included along with the historical incidents which define Boston's literary heritage. For example, we begin our tour at King's Chapel burial ground (1), by noting that Hester Prynne, the fictional heroine of *The Scarlet Letter*, lies here. Hawthorne may have disliked the narrowness of his Puritan ancestors, but he nevertheless adopted their moral perspective as a way to frame a story. Though written in the nineteenth century, *The Scarlet Letter* may be the book that best communicates the Puritan's struggle with conscience.

1. King's Chapel and the Parker House ca. 1860.
2. William Dean Howells
3. James Russell Lowell
4. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
5. Ticknor's house at the corner of Park and Beacon Streets
6. The Boston Athanaeum
7. Robert Gould Shaw Monument
8. Parkman House at 50 Chestnut Street
9. Oliver Wendell Holmes
10. Bridge in the Public Garden
11. Nathaniel Hawthorne and his publishers George Ticknor and James Fields



Turning from fiction to fact, and from King's Chapel to the Parker House, we recall the dinner at which the young "westerner," William Dean Howells, was initiated into the company of James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Fields, editor of the influential *Atlantic Monthly*. Howells, who conveys his awe of Boston in a number of novels written before he moved to New York, later took over editorship of the *Atlantic*.

The Parker House was also the first meeting place of the Saturday Club, whose members included Emerson, Holmes, Lowell, Longfellow, Dana, and Hawthorne. In an area that prided itself on the strength of its intellectual community, there had to be mavericks to whom such organizations were suspect. Henry David Thoreau naturally questioned the enterprise:

They have got a club, the handle of which is in the Parker House at Boston, and with this they beat me from time to time, expecting to make me tender or minced meat....



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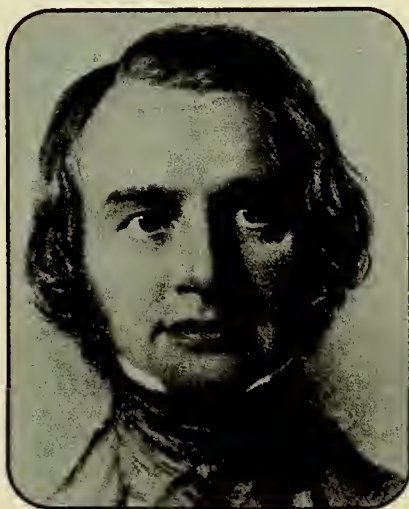
Before leaving the Parker House, note that Willa Cather lived here for almost a year gathering material on Christian Science for *McClure's Magazine*.

At 124 Tremont Street, where the bookstore of Ticknor and Fields once stood, William Dean Howells first met Mark Twain. Self-conscious himself about fitting into the East, Howells professed to be shocked at Mark Twain's appearance:

Samuel L. Clemens was wearing a sealskin coat with the fur out, in the satisfaction of a caprice, or the love of strong effect which he was to indulge through life.

At an anniversary dinner for Whittier, Clemens learned that even Mark Twain could not ignore Boston's judgments: when he mocked the local pundits—Longfellow, Holmes, and Emerson—he was chilled by the cool response.

Somewhere on the Tremont Street side of the Common (2) sat the hero of Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backwards*, "finding an interest merely in watching the throngs that passed, such as one has in studying the populace of a foreign city."



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Perhaps it is no accident that the part of the Common in the shadow of the State House, known as Beacon Street Mall (3), has often seen confrontations between Boston's desire for quality on the one hand and democratic equality on the other. Here it was that Henry Adams and the "Beacon Street cowards" often faced the intrepid Conky Daniels and his gang in snowball fights that ranged up over the hill. Here they learned that "black-guardism had the charm of force and freedom and superiority to culture and decency." Yet the "cowards" later proved themselves willing to die for an ideal:

ten or twelve years afterwards when these same boys were fighting and falling on the battlefields of Virginia, (Adams) wondered whether their education on Boston Common had taught Savage and Marvin how to die.

Perhaps the liveliest literary rendezvous that ever took place in Boston occurred on the Beacon Street Mall when Emerson and Whitman walked back and forth arguing about taking the sex out of *Leaves of Grass*:

... Each point of Emerson's statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete or convincing. I could never hear the points better put — and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way.

In the Bellevue Hotel Apartments (no. 21), Louisa May Alcott wrote many of her novels and stories: in order to write, she had to get away from the domesticity her work celebrates. Also in the Bellevue was the local apartment of John F. Kennedy, one of the few politicians ever publicly



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Houghton Mifflin



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to honor literature: "When power narrows the areas of man's concern," he wrote, "poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence."

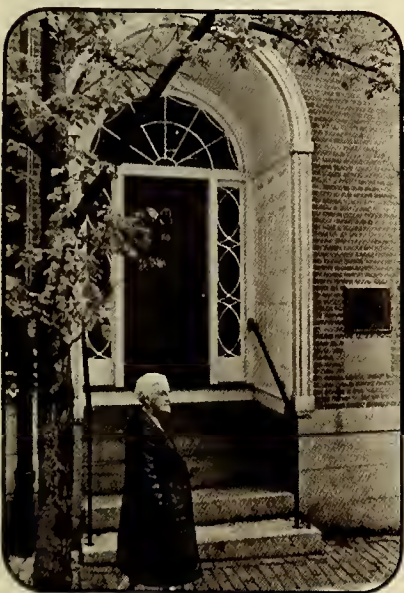
The Athenaeum at 10½ Beacon Street long played a role in the cultural education of aristocratic Boston. Henry James referred to it as "the place that was to Boston at large as Boston was to the rest of New England." He hated the tall buildings that grew up around it, emphasizing its small size, and he could find no compensation in the massive new public library for what had been lost here. We, on the other hand, will pay a momentary tribute to George Ticknor, one of the founders of the Boston Public Library, who lived at no. 22, now a silver shop. Ticknor gave his personal library, as well as his energy and support, to the Public Library, showing the concern many Bostonians felt for the education of the average man.

On the Bowdoin Street corner of the State House grounds (4) stood the house of Major Molineux, the figure who inspired Hawthorne's short story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," about a young man's search for identity in the city; it is one of the rare pieces of writing that may be interpreted as a parable of the American Revolution.



Augustus St. Gaudens' Civil War monument to Robert Gould Shaw and his men (5) brings to mind Robert Lowell's twentieth century poem, "For the Union Dead." Lowell contrasts the failure of modern life with the heroism of the 54th Regiment and its colonel, "lean as a compass needle." That compass points back to a tradition of democratic idealism which the statue itself exemplifies: the Shaw family did not choose a solitary equestrian monument; they wanted Shaw on a level with the black men who died with him.

This idealism has remained with writers into our century: at the State House, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Dos Passos, and Upton Sinclair protested with many others the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti as a betrayal of the constitutional assurance of





equality under law. At 415 Beacon Street, John Wheelwright, whose heritage of protest reaches back to the Puritans exiled with Anne Hutchinson, wrote one of the best memorials ("Come on Over and Help Us") to the immigrant shoemaker and peddler whose untutored letters have also become part of our literary heritage.

The distinguished 19th century American historian, Francis Parkman, lived at 50 Chestnut Street. Here, in his third floor study, Parkman struggled against physical disability for twenty-nine years to record the "history of the American forest." "He disliked the words 'culture' and 'refinement' because they suggested the artificial," wrote Van Wyck Brooks. "What he called the 'improved savage' was Parkman's favorite type, delicate in his feelings and decent

in behaviour and also virile, natural, resourceful and strong

His neighbor at 48 Chestnut was Richard Henry Dana, Jr., who wrote *Two Years Before the Mast*, a protest against the mistreatment of sailors. Dana's failure to get the British ambassadorship because of ruthless political slander suggests the waning of what was once a tradition, still strong in many countries, of men of letters playing a role in national government.

At 13 Chestnut lived Julia Ward Howe, in what she called "the frozen ocean of Boston life," before she wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Mrs. Howe seemed to feel the restlessness that characterizes the American people; she lived in three different houses in this area.

"Mt. Vernon Street," said Henry James, is like "some



good flushed lady of more than middle age." "Viewed from Mt. Vernon Street," wrote Henry Adams, "the problem of life was as simple as it was classic . . . social perfection was sure." No wonder William Dean Howells chose 48 Mt. Vernon Street as the address of the peerless Coreys, where Silas Lapham shocked proper Boston by getting drunk.

At no. 57 lived Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy Adams, Civil War ambassador to England, and father of two writers, Brooks and Henry, who stated ironically that "Boston has solved the universe." The disillusionment both brothers came to feel is mirrored in the titles of their books: *Law of Civilization and Decay* and *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma*.

59 Mt. Vernon was the home of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, author of Peck's *Baa Boy*, editor of the

Atlantic, and one of few New Englanders able to write of his fear of the vast immigrant influx ("Unguarded Gates"). Yet Aldrich was a friend of John Boyle O'Reilly, the early editor of *The Pilot* who worked hard to reconcile the Yankees with the Irish.

Louisburg Square, "The Hub of the Hub" as Robert Lowell described it, proudly displays the feeling for aristocracy which has characterized Boston since the time of the Puritans, who considered prosperity a sign of grace. William Dean Howells lived at No. 4 when he started his most famous novel, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. No. 10 belonged to Louisa May Alcott, who moved her ailing father here to die. Bronson Alcott, an "other-worldly philosopher" — Louisa called him "Plato" — would not have noticed his surroundings.

Twentieth century readers will recall that the corner of Pinckney Street and Louisburg Square houses Jean Stafford's *Miss Pride* (*Boston Adventure*) who makes her "cause" the life of a shoe-maker's daughter, Sonie Marburg. Like Howells, but more critical, Stafford seems to suggest that Boston's moral strength has passed from old Boston to the children of the new immigrants.

At 87 Pinckney lived F. O. Matthiessen (*American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*) whose exploration of the tension between democratic idealism and esthetic awareness remains among the most remarkable criticism of our time.

George Hillard at 54 Pinckney, often entertained Hawthorne, who admired the "classic refinement of Hillard's culture," but did not share his politics. Edward Everett, in an effort to come to terms with Hawthorne's Jacksonian persuasion, wrote to Hillard, "Why is he on the side of barbarism and vandalism against order, law, and constitutional liberty?"

Coming back around the square to Mt. Vernon Street, we can see no. 102, where Henry James moved after his mother's death. Here he wrote the dramatic version of *Daisy Miller*. Although we may argue that James thoroughly absorbed the New England moral tradition he sometimes mocked, he nevertheless needed a different environment in order to write his best work.

Charles Street presents a particular problem in our search for the past; much has been torn down and numbers have been changed. We shall have to imagine no. 148 near the river, where James and Annie Adams Fields held the most important literary salon in Boston. Here came such luminaries as Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, Mark Twain and Henry James; and from

abroad, Thackeray, Dickens, and Matthew Arnold. Sarah Orne Jewett (*The Country of the Pointed Firs*) spent long periods of time here and extended her influence into our century through her effect on Willa Cather, whom she met in the Fieldses' house.

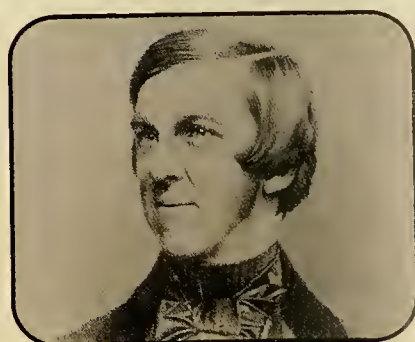
At 127 Charles lived Lucretia Hale, sister of Edward Everett Hale ("The Man without a Country"). She wrote *The Peterkin Papers*, a book which shows that Bostonians can laugh at their own foibles.

Perhaps the most important resident of this part of Charles Street will always be Olive Chancellor of *The Bostonians* by Henry James, the dominating, elegant reformer whose life so poignantly bespeaks the repression of her class.

The Charles Street Meeting House at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Charles suggests the vitality of black culture in Boston: in our century, Langston Hughes gave poetry readings in the Afro-American culture center here.

Children will be quick to point out that we are following the footsteps of Robert McCloskey's parade of ducklings (*Make Way For Ducklings*) as we head toward Beacon Street.

Turning west at Charles and Beacon we might keep our eyes open for George Apley as we walk toward No. 293, where Oliver Wendell Holmes, "the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," lived. Holmes' neighbor, William Dean Howells, who bought No. 302 in time for his daughter's debut, often preferred to write letters to the distinguished doctor rather than wait below for approval as a visitor.



When Howells purchased his Beacon Street house, he felt that he had arrived in the world he admired. To Henry James he wrote, "Sometimes I feel it an extraordinary thing that I should have been able to buy a house on Beacon Street." When he later decided to move to New York, however, he found himself able to say that Boston was "death-in-life."

For the more cosmopolitan poet-philosopher, George Santayana, who lived in this very house, 302 Beacon was no mark of success. He described the house as a "white elephant," complaining of its hideous plate glass and its narrow width, and noted that sluggish tides made the river stench unbearable. Different as they were, Santayana and Howells shared a common frustration: in their final alienation from the city, both seemed to be seeking freedom from the cultural narrowness that the house physically suggests.

Returning to the Public Garden by way of Marlborough Street, we pass No. 91, the home of Henry Adams when he taught history at Harvard, boasting that he never remembered a date. Attracted by power and distressed by Boston provinciality, Adams soon settled in Washington for good.

At 11 Marlborough Street lived Edwin O'Connor, who celebrated the twentieth century dominance of Irish political power in *The Last Hurrah*.

Entering the Public Garden at Arlington Street, we notice the graceful bridge (6) that several of William Dean Howells' characters admired; it is harder to spot the naked statue one of his country people thought "indecent."



Although Mrs. Daintry in Henry James' "A New England Winter" often crossed the Garden from her home on the "new land" to visit "the hill," she would not have been able to enjoy sitting here, for it was understood that no "Bostonian with connections would ever do anything so plebian as to sit in the Public Garden on a bench."

Tensions between classes have always been a part of the city. F. Marion Crawford, a nineteenth century writer of romantic tales, saw this in the Garden:

There is a smell of violets and flowers in the warm air, and down on the little pond the swan-shaped boats are paddling about with their cargoes of merry children and calico nursery maids, while the Irish boys look on from the banks and throw pebbles when the policemen are not looking, wishing they had the spare coin necessary for a ten minute voyage on the mimic sea.

Perhaps the discrepancy between social reality and a democratic ideal will continue to inspire writers to look critically at Boston. Today, secure in a long tradition of conscience, the city is still home to many of the nation's best writers. To universities in the Boston area have come as teachers or students a host of internationally known authors, including T. S. Eliot, Thomas Wolfe, E. E. Cummings, Lillian Hellman, Archibald MacLeish and Elizabeth Bishop. Living or working in Boston today are, among others, Dan Wakefield, David McCord, Tom McHale, John Updike, L. E. Sissman, Samuel Eliot Morison, X. J. Kennedy, John Malcolm Brinnin and Denise Levertov. Publishing is still a vital industry, and includes historic houses such as Little, Brown and Houghton Mifflin, as well as university presses at Harvard and M.I.T. Journalistic strength is reflected in the renowned *Christian Science Monitor* and in Pulitzer Prize winning articles in the *Boston Globe*.

A Bicentennial Program

Boston 200 Literary Forums

Boston: A State of Mind. A 300 Year Dialogue between Author and Audience.

Contrasts

Going down to Boston

Boston's Puritan heritage of concern for the life of the mind and spirit continues today in the work of her best writers.

Boston's rich heritage and continuing contributions to literature are celebrated in a program jointly sponsored by the Boston Public Library and Boston 200, and located in the new wing of the central library (7), at Copley Square. The program has four parts:

This series of poetry readings and discussions by Massachusetts writers will be open free to the public, in the auditorium of the library, through December 1976. Programs giving the time, date and speakers for each program are available at the library and at Boston 200 information centers.

This exhibit, located in the Great Hall of the library, is a chronological and thematic survey of Boston's literary history, from 1630 to the present. (April 1975-December 1976)

This exhibit, located off the Great Hall of the library, contrasts the lives and works of six Boston writers from different periods, and compares their attitudes towards society, literature, and the city they called home. (April 1975-September 1975; central library. October 1975-December 1976; other Massachusetts libraries.)

These exhibits were designed by William Harris, of Target Communications, Inc. Historical research and writing by Barbara Hobson and Paul Wright

This slide/tape exhibition is shown at scheduled times in the library's auditorium, and shows how Boston writers have responded to their city, through the authors' words and works. (April 1975-December 1976)

This exhibit was designed by Richard Gutman, with a script by Paul Wright. The library is open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. weekdays, from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Saturdays, and from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Sundays.

This program is made possible by support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. The program was planned by the Boston 200 Task Force on Literature, David Hall, chairman. Steering committee: Y. T. Feng, David Grace, Eugenia Kaledin, Richard Sterne, Cecelia Tichi, Millicent Bell, Peter Davison, Martin Green, Garth Hite, Maxine Kumin, David McCord and Arabel Porter. Joan Hobson, Boston 200 Program Coordinator.

The Old Corner Bookstore



An additional exhibit about Boston's literary past is located in this historic building at the corner of Tremont and School Streets (8). Described is the building's history as the meeting place of Emerson, Hawthorne and other nineteenth century figures, and as the home of the publishing house of Ticknor and Fields. Sponsored by the Boston Globe, this exhibit is open free to the public.

Credits

This brochure is partially supported by a donation from Little, Brown & Company. Text by Eugenia Kaledin. Photographs courtesy of Lou Jones unless otherwise noted.

Designed by Deenie Yudell and Judy Ziegler

Boston 200 is the city's official program to observe the Bicentennial of the American Revolution from April 1975 through December 1976.

**Kevin H. White, Mayor
Katharine D. Kane, Director**

**1 Beacon Street
Boston, Mass 02108
617-338-1775**

Boston 200

The City is the Exhibit

Boston's Bicentennial programs have placed the entire city on display through 1976.

Three world's fair scale exhibitions — "The Revolution," "The Grand Exposition of Progress and Invention," and "Where's Boston" — highlight, respectively, Boston in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Eight new walking trails and hundreds of historical markers translate today's city into a place where other Americans lived and other buildings crowded the sky. Some twenty Bicentennial theme exhibits reveal the legacy given to the world by Bostonians in such fields as literature, religion, medicine, art, science, women's history, and commerce.

Ethnic festivals, troubadours, children's festivals, and performances showcase America's artistic vitality, while forums, publications, and oral histories provide new ways to examine the country's past. Permanent environmental improvements include preservation of historic landmarks and clean up of neighborhood parks.

New visitor centers at Boston City Hall and near Copley Square, as well as the Freedom Trail booth on Boston Common, offer literature (guidebook, calendars of events, maps, Passport) and a staff well-trained in answering questions. The Gray Line Bicentennial Shuttle bus circles Boston during the summers of 1975-1976 providing transportation to the major attractions and a bus driver/tour guide who knows all about them.

There's a lot more, of course, to Bicentennial Boston. Call 338-1976 for more information, and please remember:

Plan your trip,
Leave the car behind,
Walk or shuttle,-
Enjoy.